



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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**North Carolina Board of Transportation
Environmental Planning and Policy Committee
Meeting Minutes for July 12, 2006**

A meeting of the Environmental Planning and Policy Committee (EPPC) was held July 12, 2006 at 8:30 AM in the Board Room (Room 150) of the Transportation Building. Board Member Nina Szlosberg chaired the meeting. Other Board of Transportation members that attended were:

Bob Collier
Arnold Lakey
Andrew Perkins
Alan Thornberg
Nancy Dunn

Douglas Galyon
Tom Betts
Lanny Wilson
Cam McRae

Other attendees included:

Julie Hunkins
Joel Setzer
Anthony Roper
Rob Hanson
Ricky Greene
Victor Barbour
Wally Bowman
Gail Grimes
Kari Metcalf
Andrew Sawyer
Elizabeth Neely
Derry Schmidt
Donna Dancausse

Ehren Meister
Tad Boggs
Donnie Brew
Dan Thomas
Marcus Wilner
Eddie Dancausse
Don Voelker
Daniel Keel
Ken Pace
Mike Bruff
Amy Simes
Bob Andrews
John Long

Larry Goode
Berry Jenkins
Mike Mills
C.A. Gardner
Shannon Lasater
Roy Shelton
Steve Browde
Jim Scapellato
Steve DeWitt
Mike Pettyjohn
Mike Holder
Joel Setzer
Linda Rimer

Ms. Szlosberg called the meeting to order and circulated the attendance sheet. Ms. Szlosberg accepted a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the May 2006 committee meeting. The minutes were approved as presented.

Ms. Szlosberg began by commenting on the growing concern for the relationship between land use and transportation. In consideration of this concern, the Interagency Leadership Team began looking for entities within the state that integrating land use and transportation solutions. Two such groups that emerged were the Sustainable Environment for Quality of Life (SEQL) and

Sustainable Sandhills. Ms. Szlosberg introduced Linda Rimer with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Ms. Rimer introduced the EPA's involvement with SEQL and Sustainable Sandhills. She noted that the mission of the EPA is to protect public health and the environment, but that its mission is increasingly being threatened by urbanization. This issue created the opportunity to become involved in the two organization's land use objectives. Sustainable Sandhills began as Sustainable Fort Bragg, but the base soon discovered it could not implement its plan without the involvement of the surrounding area. Eight counties then joined the effort to protect water and air quality, land use, and energy resources of the region to maintain a high quality of life. Ms. Rimer introduced Rebecca Yarborough, one of the primary contacts for SEQL with the Centralina Council of Governments (COG).

Ms. Yarborough stated that though sustainability includes many aspects, she would focus most of her presentation on integrated planning. She discussed the history of SEQL, which was started in 2001 by the city of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. It soon became managed by Centralina and Catawba Regional COGs. SEQL quickly spread from 26 jurisdictions to over 86 jurisdictions and stakeholder groups and received some EPA funding. SEQL developed an "action toolkit" and has since progressed beyond effective action implementation to attempting to revise the decision-making process. SEQL works with 11 counties in North Carolina and with four counties in South Carolina through the Catawba Regional Council.

Ms. Yarborough described SEQL's three goals that involve turning the items selected during consensus into meaningful actions. These goals include:

- ◆ Implementing regionally endorsed environmental initiatives
- ◆ Engaging in on-going regional Integrated Environmental Planning and action
- ◆ Institutionalizing environmental considerations in local and regional decision making

Ms. Yarborough emphasized that removing people from the "silos" that traditionally separate air quality, water quality and land use interests is an important part of the integration process. By unifying disparate actions, broad environmental goals are easier to achieve. Eighty-six (86) jurisdictions have reported participation in more than 750 educational, planning, and technical actions in areas affecting air quality, water quality, and sustainable growth. The air quality actions are estimated to have reduced emissions by 62 tons annually through voluntary participation.

Elected officials were consulted in the planning process as to what integrated planning meant to them. Their definition included concern for cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional actions, and a surprising willingness to work with hidden populations, or those groups not usually consulted during the planning process. Ms. Yarborough noted that local elected officials were more likely to consider an initiative if it would benefit more than one objective.

Ms. Yarborough listed the key tools used in integration of sustainable practices. Visioning involves consulting residents about the qualities or characteristics they value in their

communities and their lifestyle choices. A Land Use/Comprehensive Planning Process based on a vision becomes a very valuable tool during planning and is actually strengthened by North Carolina General Statutes 160A-383 and 153A-341, which require the consultation of the land use plan during rezoning decisions. The “Web of Integration” concept encourages participants to consider the impacts of their actions and identifies potential partners in the process. The NCDOT is improving at using stakeholder involvement tools by inviting people to participate in decisions and planning. She cited an example where elderly adult advocates in a community were consulted on smart growth and environmental issues, overall helping seniors maintain independence. This is an example of the wide variety of people that can be consulted in the process. Data and informal communication are also very important tools that can be utilized. Ms. Yarborough provided several examples of SEQL successes and the dilemmas often encountered between smart growth and open space conservation.

Ms. Yarborough explained why their institutionalization goal is so important. Institutionalization means changing the way business is conducted, focusing on making integrated planning a central tenant in business operations. This goal has advanced considerably through the adoption of environmental and integrated planning considerations into local and regional policies. Small land area plans are now required to include the environment in their objectives. Specific tools for land use regulation have also been adopted into local ordinances. Scenario planning, while an important tool for comparing air, water, and land resources, remains challenging because it is data intensive and the modeling results may be inconsistent and subjective.

Ms. Yarborough summarized the lessons SEQL learned from the implementation phase of the integration project. A menu of options is important to all stakeholders and elected officials are more likely to approve options that meet more than one objective. Early and late adopters of policies are to be expected and can provide benefits throughout the process. Funding programs continue to work with narrow approaches to land use issues, and this needs to change in order to move from a competitive to a collaborative mindset. The greatest challenge remaining is what to do with the information once it is collected. Ms. Yarborough identified factors necessary for success, including better tools and data, more public involvement, and staff support and collaboration.

Ms. Yarborough highlighted several opportunities for collaboration with the NCDOT, including the CTP process, the Integration project, visioning and corridor planning. She expressed SEQL’s willingness to test the integration opportunities related to environmental planning issues with the NCDOT.

Ms. Szlosberg thanked Ms. Yarborough for the presentation and asked that questions be held until the end. She introduced Jon Parsons, Executive Director for Sustainable Sandhills.

Mr. Parsons began by naming the eight counties that make up the Sandhills region of North Carolina. He stated that the unifying feature among all the counties was the longleaf pine ecosystem present in each county, totaling 2.5 million acres. Mr. Parsons sang a regional folk song, “I’ve Endured,” to characterize the history and nature of sustainability to the Sandhills

region and people. With a total population of 700,000 in the region, the population location and character affects the type of growth each area desires and their view of sustainability.

Mr. Parsons examined Fort Bragg's impact on the Sustainable Sandhills initiative. A quarter of a million residents of the area relies on Fort Bragg for various jobs and services, so threats to Fort Bragg's viability mean a threat to the stability of the population. These threats include coexisting with red-cockaded wood pecker habitat and encroaching development on the boundaries of the post. The Regional Land Use Advisory Commission's joint land use study monitored growth across the region, developing an eight county unified map to identify incompatible development patterns. Resource scarcity is also a problem Fort Bragg cannot overcome without the help of the surrounding communities.

Sustainable Fort Bragg had ten goals encompassing air quality, water, energy, materials, and land use that were transferred to Sustainable Sandhills. Five teams monitor these goals, functioning to raise awareness in their focus area and execute targeted educational programs such as green building workshops and the High Performance School Systems Symposium. The teams must also develop decision support tools, like the GIS-based sustainable land use toolkit that is funded by a grant from the EPA.

Mr. Parson explained the factors that create sustainable land use. He compared it to a quilt incorporating environmental, economical and social aspects. Sustainable land use considers the values of industrial, commercial, residential, natural and working land uses to each county. The assets and constraints associated with each type of use are examined using the GIS database to determine suitability for environmental conservation or development. Residents are often surprised to discover how much the pattern of development is influenced by transportation infrastructure and because of this link, Sustainable Sandhills is eager to work the NCDOT through initiatives like the CTP process to improve planning integration.

Mr. Parsons stated that the next goal was to overlay five suitability maps of the region into one to and examine the alternative growth and development options available to each area. With EPA support, they are developing three growth pattern scenarios that model land use based on business as usual, incremental or deep changes. The outcome of each pattern has yet to be determined but the impact of each scenario on the quality of life will be a future concern in planning and development processes.

Ms. Szlosberg opened the floor for questions.

Board Member Alan Thornberg asked if the EPA money allowed Sustainable Sandhills to do the modeling. Mr. Parsons replied that it did.

Ms. Szlosberg asked how SEQL holds partners accountable for actions in land use decisions. Ms. Rimer stated the first lesson they learned in the development process is that they should have asked for these measures up front. They discovered that health was a factor that was considered too late in the process, learning that people will make environmentally conscience decisions based on health concerns. Ms. Yarborough replied that in addition to regular

interviews, by publishing the reported actions on SEQL websites their partners were subject to peer review. The North Carolina General Statutes help support land use decision accountability by requiring planners to consult previously determined plans. They are also advocating multi-jurisdictional unified development ordinances that incorporate all land use regulations into one, making integration with the transportation development process simpler. This reduces competition between jurisdictions attempting to attract development.

Ms. Szlosberg asked how replicable the suitability maps are and if they could be used statewide. Mr. Parsons doubted they could be reproduced statewide because the maps are very specific to the preferences of each county. As yet, it is too early in the process for the maps to drive development, but Ms. Yarborough replied that the process is replicable.

Board Member Bob Collier referred to a conversation he had with a man attempting to buy a farm in Cleveland County. The Health Department requires him to either renovate the chicken houses on the farm or tear them down, but he cannot get the improvement permit because the NCDOT has designated the land for a bypass corridor. Ms. Yarborough commented that situations like this represent some of the difficulties for the integrated planning process. As jurisdictions collaborate to improve tools for corridor protection, they hope to reduce these types of dilemmas.

Ms. Szlosberg emphasized that what happens on the local level has impacts at the state level as well. She said the committee would continue talking about land use and transportation integration and would like to hear from anyone else involved in the community in this issue. The meeting adjourned at 9:30 AM.

The next meeting for the Environmental Planning and Policy Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, August 2, 2006 at 8:30 A.M. in the Board of Transportation Room (Room 150) of the Transportation Building.

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